Gustavus Adolphus II of Sweden

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The battle of Lützen. Cornelis Danckerts: Historis oft waerachtich verhael.., 1632. Engraving by Matthäus Merian.

Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden

Gustavus Adolphus (9/19 December 1594 – 6/16 November 1632, O.S./N.S.), also known in English as Gustav II Adolf or Gustav II Adolph, was the King of Sweden from 1611 to 1632, and is credited for the founding of Sweden as a great power (Swedish: Stormaktstiden). He led Sweden to military supremacy during the Thirty Years' War, helping to determine the political as well as the religious balance of power in Europe. He was formally and posthumously given the name Gustavus Adolphus the Great (Swedish: Gustav Adolf den store, Latin: Gustavus Adolphus Magnus) by the Riksdag of the Estates in 1634.

He is often regarded as one of the greatest military commanders of all time, with innovative use of combined arms. His most notable military victory was the Battle of Breitenfeld (1631). With a superb military machine, good weapons, excellent training, and effective field artillery, backed by an efficient government that could provide necessary funds, Gustavus Adolphus was poised to make himself a major European leader. He was killed a year later, however, at the Battle of Lützen (1632). He was assisted in his efforts by Count Axel Oxenstierna, the Lord High Chancellor of Sweden, who also acted as regent after his death.

During his reign, Sweden rose from the status of a Baltic Sea basin regional power to one of the great powers of Europe and a model of early modern era government. Gustavus Adolphus is famously known as the "father of modern warfare",[9] or the first great modern general. Under his tutelage, Sweden and the Protestant cause developed a number of excellent commanders, such as Lennart Torstensson, who would go on to defeat Sweden's enemies and expand the boundaries and the power of the empire long after Gustavus Adolphus's death in battle. Spoils meant he became a successful bookraider in Europe, targeting Jesuit collections

He is widely commemorated by Protestants in Europe as the main defender of their cause during the Thirty Years' War, with multiple churches, foundations and other undertakings named after him, including the Gustav-Adolf-Werk. He became a symbol of Swedish pride.

Life

Gustavus Adolphus was born in Stockholm as the oldest son of Duke Charles of the Vasa dynasty and his second wife, Christina of Holstein-Gottorp. At the time, the King of Sweden was Gustavus Adolphus' cousin Sigismund. The staunch Protestant Duke Charles forced the Catholic Sigismund to let go of the throne of Sweden in 1599, a part of the preliminary religious strife before the Thirty Years' War, and reigned as regent before taking the throne as Charles IX of Sweden in 1604. Crown Prince Gustav Adolph had Gagnef-Floda in Dalecarlia as a duchy from 1610. Upon his father's death in October 1611, a sixteen-year-old Gustavus inherited the throne, being declared of age and able to reign himself at seventeen as of 16 December. He also inherited an ongoing succession of occasionally belligerent dynastic disputes with his Polish cousin. Sigismund III wanted to regain the throne of Sweden and tried to force Gustavus Adolphus to renounce the title.

In a round of this dynastic dispute, Gustavus invaded Livonia when he was 31, beginning the Polish–Swedish War (1626–29). He intervened on behalf of the Lutherans in Germany, who opened the gates to their cities to him. His reign became famous from his actions a few years later when in June 1630 he landed in Germany, marking the Swedish Intervention in the Thirty Years' War. Gustavus intervened on the anti-Imperial side, which at the time was losing to the Holy Roman Empire and its Catholic allies; the Swedish forces would quickly reverse that situation.

Gustavus was married to Maria Eleonora of Brandenburg, the daughter of John Sigismund, Elector of Brandenburg, and chose the Prussian city of Elbing as the base for his operations in Germany. He died in the Battle of Lützen in 1632. His early death was a great loss to the Lutheran side. This resulted in large parts of Germany and other countries, which had been conquered for Lutheranism, to be reconquered for Catholicism (via the Counter-Reformation). His involvement in the Thirty Years' War gave rise to the saying that he was the incarnation of "the Lion of the North", or as he is called in German "Der Löwe aus Mitternacht" (Literally: "The Lion of Midnight").

1632

In March 1632, Gustavus Adolphus invaded Bavaria, a staunch ally of the Emperor. He forced the withdrawal of his Catholic opponents at the Battle of Rain, marking the high point of the campaign. In the summer of that year, he sought a political solution that would preserve the existing structure of states in Germany, while guaranteeing the security of its Protestants. But achieving these objectives depended on his continued success on the battlefield.

Gustavus is reported to have entered battle without wearing any armor, proclaiming, "The Lord God is my armor!" It is more likely that he simply wore a leather cuirass rather than going into battle wearing no battle protection whatsoever. In 1627, near Dirschau in Prussia, a Polish soldier shot him in the muscles above his shoulders. He survived, but the doctors could not remove the bullet, so from that point on, he could not wear iron armor; two fingers of his right hand were paralyzed

Morning mist delayed the Swedish army's advance, but by 9 am the rival armies were in sight of each other. Because of a complex network of waterways and further misty weather, it took until 11 am before the Protestant force was deployed and ready to launch its attack.

Pieter Meulener.

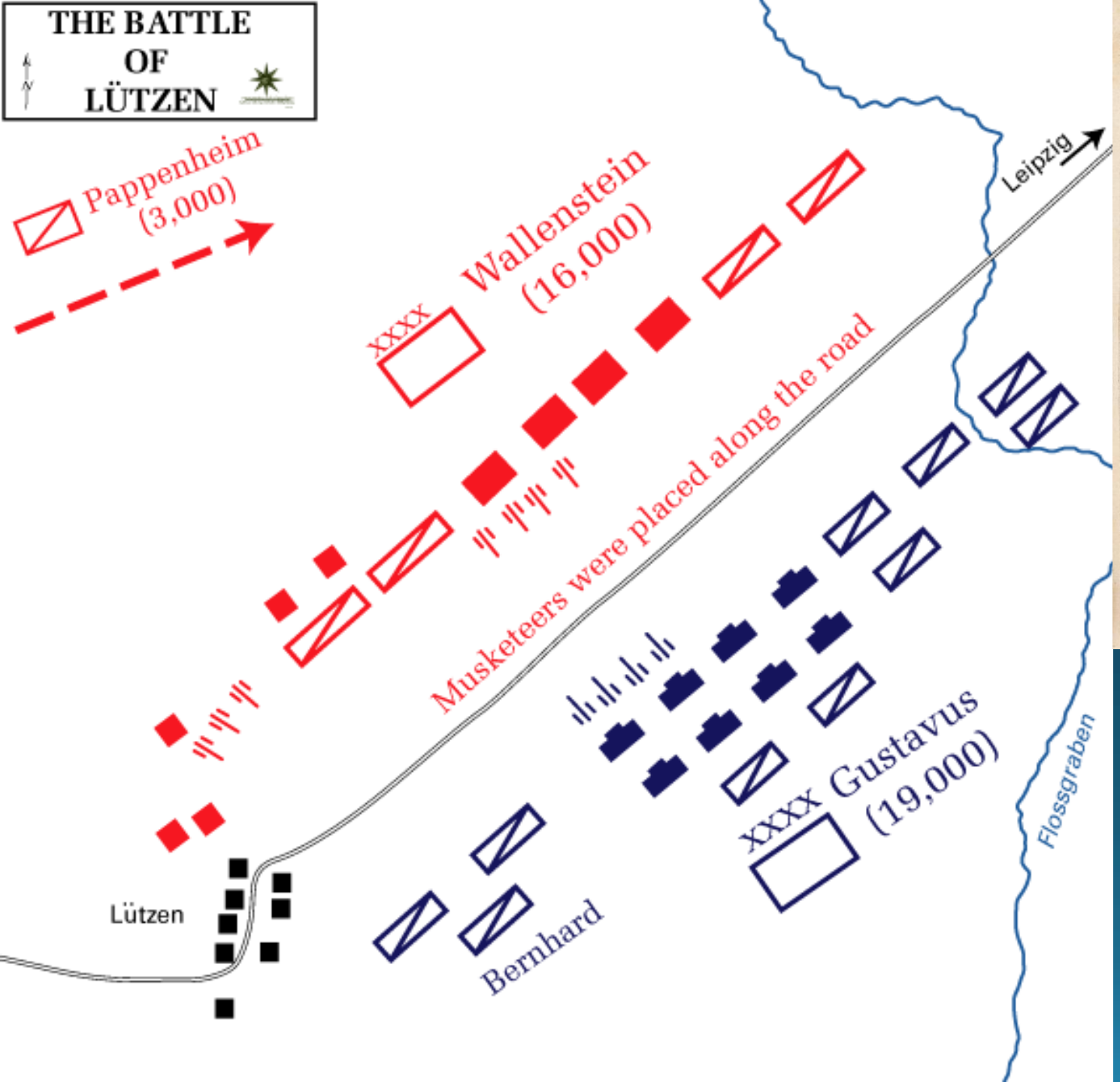
Gustavus Adolphus in the battle of Lützen by Jan Asselijn (top) and Pieter Meulener.

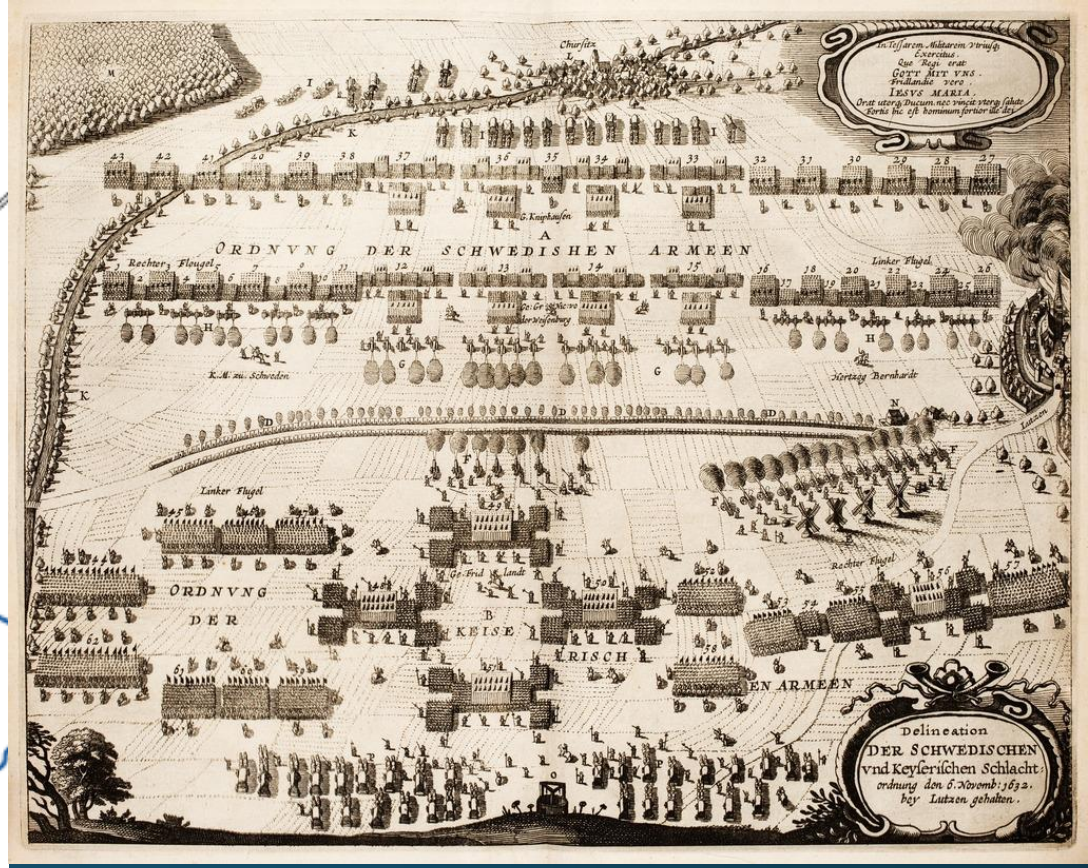
Gustavus Adolphus rode his war-horse Streiff, a brown Oldenburg that he had purchased from a Colonel Johan Streiff von Lauenstein for the sum of 1000 riksdaler

Gustavus Adolphus in the Battle of Lützen by Jan Asselijn

The battle of Lützen. Cornelis Danckerts: Historis oft waerachtich verhael.., 1632. Engraving by Matthäus Merian.

Typus
CRUENTISSIMI ILLIVS
PRÆLY, IN OVO EXERCITVS REGIS
Sueciæ cum acie cæsarea sub Duce
Fridlandiæ, cum magna utriusq; par
tis strage et plerorumq; Ducum interitu,
ad LVZAM conflixit, a.d.VI.Novem.
Anni MDC XXXII.




ORDNVNG DER SCHWEDISHEN ARMEEN
ORDNVNG DER KEISERISCHEN ARMEEN
Delineation DER SCHWEDISCHEN vnd Keyserischen Schlacht ordnung den 6. Novemb: 1632. bey Lutzen gehalten.

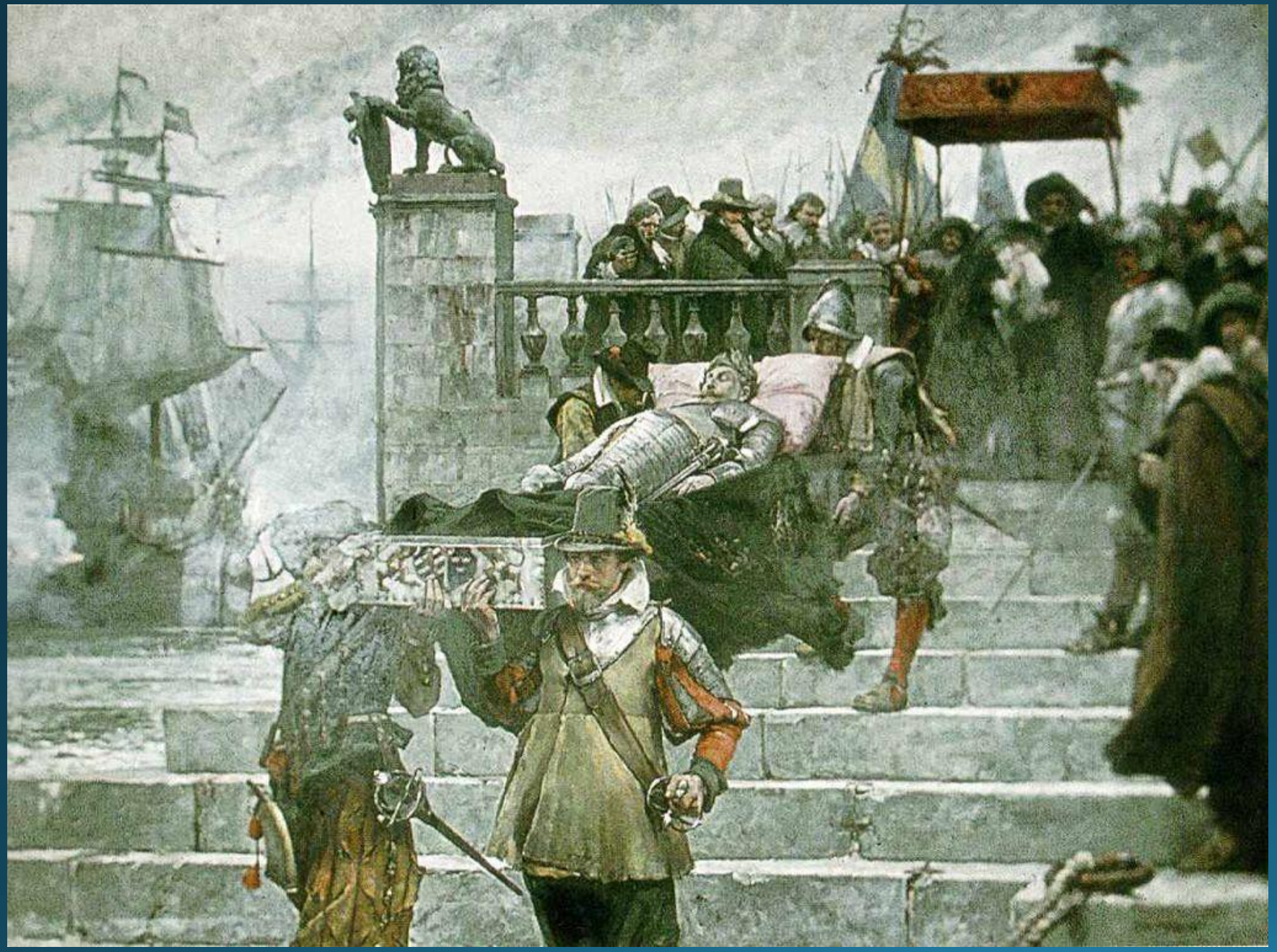
Army positions in a diagram (top) and in a 1642 engraving by Merian

The king's death in his final battle as depicted by Carl Wahlbom in 1855

Death

The Battle of Lützen (6 November 1632) was one of the most decisive battles of the Thirty Years' War. It was a Protestant victory, but the Protestant alliance lost one of its most important leaders, which caused the Protestant campaign to lose direction. Gustavus Adolphus was killed when, at a crucial point in the battle, he became separated from his troops while leading a cavalry charge on his wing.

Towards 1:00 pm, in the thick mix of gun smoke and fog covering the field, the king was separated from his fellow riders and suffered multiple shots. A bullet crushed his left arm below the elbow. Almost simultaneously his horse suffered a shot to the neck that made it hard to control. In the mix of fog and smoke from the burning town of Lützen the king rode astray behind enemy lines. There he sustained yet another shot in the back, was stabbed and fell from his horse. Lying on the ground, he received a final, fatal shot to the temple.



Gustavus Adolphus's body departing Germany for Sweden as imagined by Carl Gustaf Hellqvist in 1885

Gustavus Adolphus's sarcophagus at Riddarholm Church

Aftermath

The Swedish army achieved the main goals of its campaign. The Imperial onslaught on Saxony was halted, Wallenstein chose to withdraw from Saxony into Bohemia for the winter, and Saxony continued in its alliance with the Swedes. However, without Gustavus Adolphus to unify the German Protestants, their war effort lost direction. As a result, the Catholic Habsburgs were able to restore their balance and subsequently regain some of the losses Gustavus Adolphus had inflicted on them.

Crucially, Gustavus Adolphus's death enabled the Catholic French to gain much firmer control of the anti-Habsburg alliance. Sweden's new regency was forced to accept a far less dominant role than it had held before the battle. The war was eventually concluded at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

Gustavus Adolfus's leather coat - The Royal Armoury, Sweden

Streiff - The Royal Armoury